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HOW BESSIE KEPT HOUSE

AMANDA · M · DOUGLAS

HOW BESSIE KEPT HOUSE



Frontispiece—"How Bessie Kept House."

"DON'T YOU WANT TO TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT?"

HOW BESSIE KEPT HOUSE

BY
AMANDA M. DOUGLAS

Author of

"Larry," "The Kathie Stories,"

Etc.



Illustrations by L. R. LEOPOLD

PHILADELPHIA

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I		PAGE
BESSIE'S AMBITION		13

CHAPTER II		
BESSIE'S TROUBLES BEGIN		25

CHAPTER III		
BESSIE'S SEVERE LESSON		49

CHAPTER IV		
BESSIE'S "HIGHER HOUSEKEEPING"		69

LAURA'S LESSON		81
--------------------------	--	----

JESSIE'S DOLLAR		103
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ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
“ ‘Don’t you want to tell me all about it?’ ”	
<i>Frontispiece.</i>	✓
“ ‘Can’t you mend it?’ ”	41 ✓
“ ‘Carrie denied ‘up and down’ ”	59 ✓

BESSIE'S AMBITION

HOW BESSIE KEPT HOUSE

CHAPTER I

BESSIE'S AMBITION

“O H, I know I could, mother. Please do let me. And, above all, too, I should not feel afraid without Cousin Jane, for there will be Dick and father at night.”

Bessie's face was very eager and her eyes so imploring that the mother smiled.

“Cousin Jane has been so poorly with rheumatism that I hate to ask her, but she could sit still and tell you what was best.”

How Bessie Kept House

That was just what Bessie did not want. She hated to be "ordered round," as she expressed it, and Cousin Jane was a firm believer in Satan finding mischief for idle hands. No hands that she could keep busy were ever allowed to be idle. So Bessie quickly interrupted her mother with—

"There isn't much to tell. I help you do the work every day, and know as well as Cousin Jane. And it will be only such a little while. I'd so much rather be alone."

"What does father say?"

Mr. Collins glanced up from his paper and looked at his wife and his little daughter of twelve.

"Why, I don't see but that Bessie can do well enough, if she does not go off to play and forget my dinner."

How Bessie Kept House

“Oh, I will not. I will be careful not to forget a single thing.”

“There are the children—”

“I’ll take Jamie in the field with me.”

“And I, surely, can take care of Freddy.”

“If you *will* be careful, Bessie. But you are so heedless.”

Bessie flushed at this. She had a fancy that her mother did not at all appreciate her. She was as bright and smart as other girls, she knew, and it would be just lovely to have two or three days to herself, to do quite as she liked—by which you will know that Bessie was very fond of having her own way.

However, it was settled before Bessie went to bed. No one was to be asked to come. She would have the whole house to herself, and must try to do her best.

How Bessie Kept House

She could hardly get asleep for thinking of it. She would have the Lewis girls over one afternoon, and they would have such fun! If she only dared ask Carrie Lanham, who was so very funny, but her mother had refused her permission to go to Carrie's house, and had said that she did not approve of such a companion. But Bessie went to school with her, and if she was good enough to go to school, and to Sunday-school, why—she couldn't be so very bad. And not to have to sew any, and to do the work when she liked—oh, it would be just splendid!

So the next morning Mrs. Collins kissed her and said good-by, taking Lotty, the baby, with her, to make a short visit to the next town where Grandmother Collins was ill.

How Bessie Kept House

The train went at nine. Mrs. Collins was up early and had the breakfast table all out of the way, the chambers put in order, and left only the "shed" for Bessie to clear up after she was gone.

"Be sure and have your dinner ready by twelve," said her mother, "and don't go off anywhere, Bessie. On Friday at five I shall be back, so be a good little daughter."

Jamie went over to the station to carry his mother's bag. Freddy took his blocks to the shady corner of the porch, and Bessie went to the shed, as they called their rough summer kitchen, because they piled their wood in it during the winter, and kept various articles of provision in it, though they only used it for washing then. There were the breakfast knives to scour, the place to

How Bessie Kept House

sweep up, beans to shell for dinner, and three hours to do it in.

She stood in the doorway for several moments, looking out over the distant fields.

“I don’t believe I will scour the knives this morning,” she said, presently. “We will only need three more at dinner, and I can do it all then under the one fuss. And I’ll just brush up the kitchen. I shall have to give it a good sweeping after dinner. Eleven will be early enough to begin at the beans. If I kept house I should not work every moment of the time, I know. When I am married—”

Bessie fell into a brown study there, and out of the chaos of thought came a bright idea. There was a book up in Dick’s room that she wanted to

How Bessie Kept House

read; she had stolen a few pages of it already. She did not even pause to brush up the kitchen, but ran upstairs.

The room was in perfect order. On his table lay a Bible, a Familiar Science, and a Tourist's Guide. Dick had a mean way of hiding his nice story books, and mamma approved of it. When she was a young lady she would read everything that she wanted to. Patchwork and crocheting were foolish things and a great waste of time nowadays—Mrs. Alwin said so the other day. And mending and all that, Bessie had a little twinge of conscience there. Her stocking darning for the week was not done, because she went out to tea yesterday. “But, then, there is plenty of time,” she said to herself.

So Bessie began to hunt around; three

How Bessie Kept House

bureau drawers were searched with no result, but the fourth was locked. She found her mother's bunch of keys, but none of them would fit. Her own little trunk key—but no. There was something in the drawer, of course—the book she wanted and maybe others. Then a bright thought came into her mind. Take out the drawer above it, to be sure!

It was quite heavy and her arms were not very strong, so it came down with a crash, tumbling out the clothes, and a bottle of something that, fortunately, did not break. Yes, there was the very book. She seized it eagerly, found her place, sat down by the window, and forgot all else.

“When you are older and have more judgment you may read some of these works,” her mother had said, “but at

How Bessie Kept House

present excessive reading is a bad habit, and I do not want your mind taken away from your studies. There are other reasons, too, that you will understand as you grow older.”

BESSIE'S TROUBLES BEGIN

CHAPTER II

BESSIE'S TROUBLES BEGIN

IT was vacation now, so her mother's restrictions could not hold good.

She read on and on until Freddy came trudging upstairs crying—

“Bessie, Bessie, I'm so hungry, I want a biscuit. Oh, you've broken Dick's bureau!”

Bessie started in guilty affright and let her book fall.

“Go right downstairs, Fred, right away!” stamping her foot.

“But you've broken the bureau!”

“No, I haven't!” Then, recovering from her fright, she said with a laugh, “I was only fixing Dick's clothes. Come

How Bessie Kept House

down with sister and she will give you a nice piece of cake.”

Bessie knew by experience that to beg Freddy not to tell was the surest way to make him. And though she did not feel in a very pleasant humor, she wanted to lead him to forget the incident, or if he did mention it to have him do so in no suspicious manner.

“Will you have a piece of this nice gingerbread, or a biscuit? Oh, Freddy, what have you been doing? Making a fire there on the floor? You bad, wicked boy! Why, you might have set the house on fire! I have a good mind not to give you anything.”

“It was only a little bonfire,” whimpered Freddy. “It fell off of the stove hearth and burned, and I couldn’t pick it up.”

How Bessie Kept House

There was a scorched spot on the floor that mother's sharp eyes would be sure to detect. Oh, dear!

She scolded Freddy soundly. He cried, and she gave him a piece of cake to pacify him, swept up the fragments, and lifted the stove lid. The fire was out. Just then the clock struck eleven.

First of all, she must go upstairs and put Dick's bureau in order. If she only dared take the book out. Would he look at dinner-time?

She stood and considered, read another page, and then hurriedly thrust the book back into its place, took up the drawer and began to push it in, but alas, it seemed a world too big. If one corner went in the other wouldn't. If the bottom went in the top caught. She pinched her fingers, scraped her knuckles, cried a

How Bessie Kept House

little, and at last, by accident, hit the fortunate medium. The clothes were tumbled in. Which corner held the bottle? For the life of her she could not tell; so she put it in at a venture and ran downstairs. Half-past eleven, and no fire, no beans shelled, no potatoes ready! She let down the coal and put in some dry wood, set the tea-kettle over, washed her potatoes, burned two fingers in her haste, then went at arranging the table.

“I don’t believe father knew about the beans,” putting them out of sight. “There is cold meat and pie, and it will do well enough. Oh, dear, my poor fingers!”

Father and Jamie came in at a quarter past twelve; Dick, who was in a store, five minutes later. She had managed to

How Bessie Kept House

wash Freddy, and he had begged her not to tell about the fire, because he meant to be so very good all day long. But she was flurried, and her hand pained, and altogether she felt like crying.

“Well, little housekeeper,” exclaimed Dick, cheerily, “your table looks as nice as a new pin. There is one white mark for you. I am to keep account, you know.”

Bessie flushed uneasily. She wasn't bad or deceitful by nature, or rather, I should say, not persistently, and now her conscience smote her, because she knew she did not deserve a white mark.

“I want to stay home this afternoon,” declared Jamie; “I am going to make my pigeon coop.”

“You had better come with me, and I'll do it this evening. You might bring

How Bessie Kept House

a basket and gather some nice wild grapes," said his father.

"Can't I go, too?" asked Freddy.
"I'm tired of being all alone."

"No, you stay with sister this afternoon. To-morrow I will take you and Jamie riding as far as the stone bridge if you are good boys."

That settled the matter happily.

"Oh, Bessie," her father said, presently, "I picked some limas this morning for dinner. I suppose your mother forgot to speak of it. You might cook them for tea. They are coming on so fast."

"Well, I will hunt them up," she said, with a little flush.

She was very glad to get them all out of the way. Freddy lay on the lounge with his picture-book in his hand, and she knew he would soon drop asleep.

How Bessie Kept House

She ran upstairs to take another glance at Dick's drawer. It *did* look tumbled, so she straightened out the articles, placed them in little piles, and left it neat enough, hoping that Dick would not notice any little change. Then she took her dishes out to the shed sink, cleared up the dining-room, brushed out the flies, and went to dish-washing.

Oh, here were her breakfast knives all rusted! Some one had dropped water over them, and now the scouring would be twice as hard. The hot water made her scraped fingers smart, and Bessie really could not help crying. After the work was done she shelled her beans, tried to scrub out the burnt spot on the floor, and found it past three o'clock. Freddy woke up then and went out on the porch. She tied up her four fingers

How Bessie Kept House

with some cooling ointment, brushed her hair, and changed her dress, when Addie Strong came in.

“I want you to come over to our house to tea to-morrow,” she said. “My two cousins from Newton are to spend the day. Gracie plays so beautifully, you know, and you are so fond of music. I shall not ask anyone else.”

“And I can’t come. It is too bad. Oh, dear!” and she had half a mind to send for Cousin Jane, cross old thing that she was. And maybe she wouldn’t let her go. Cousin Jane thought so much liberty was the ruin of children nowadays. No, she could not go—that was all about it.

Addie was very sorry, and Bessie could have cried, but there was no help for it. She walked a short distance down the

How Bessie Kept House

street with her, and paused at the gate to speak to Sophie Lewis. Could they not come over a little while to-morrow afternoon?

Of course they would. And if Mrs. Collins was away, they would have such fun.

“What is it? Can’t I come, too? Don’t shut me out of fun,” said Carrie Lanham’s gay voice.

“If you like,” said Bessie, thinking that she really could not help asking her, and rather glad that it had so happened.

“We’ll have a regular frolic in the barn. Your barn is such a nice, clean place.”

When she reached home she found that Freddy had been digging dirt out of the path and carrying it up on the porch,

How Bessie Kept House

where with a cup of water he was making pies.

“Oh, Freddy, you bad boy! Mother has forbidden you to bring sand up on this porch. And look at your clean apron! Oh, you disobedient, aggravating—there, take that, and clear out with your blocks!”

She gave him a hard slap in her vexation.

“I’ll tell mother — you see!” and Freddy cried more with anger than pain. “I won’t pick up a single block, you ugly old thing!”

“You deserve a good whipping, that’s what you do!” and for a moment Bessie would have been delighted to administer it. But Mrs. Collins had forbidden the elder children to strike the younger ones, no matter what the provocation might be.

How Bessie Kept House

So Bessie swept the porch and then wiped it over with the mop. It was time to make up the fire again. She was cross to Freddy, out of temper, and as a natural result everything went wrong. Supper was a little late, but so was her father, and Dick never reached home until seven.

She went to bed shortly after her work was done, for she was tired and out of spirits. Housekeeping had not been the brilliant success she imagined it. But Freddy was so much trouble. Never mind, to-morrow afternoon he would be gone, and she and the girls could have a good time.

Her father had the kettle boiling in the morning before he called her. The smart and ache was out of her fingers, and she felt rested. Everything

How Bessie Kept House

went smoothly at breakfast, only Dick said—

“You need not have taken so much pains setting my drawer aside, Bessie. I had to laugh this morning when I could not find a single thing where I had put it. But I suppose housekeeping was a great treat to you,” and he laughed.

Bessie flushed. He would never know the rest, but if she *could* only have the book to read.

“If that’s a specimen, you’ll be splendid, Bessie, neat enough for an old maid.”

Bessie turned away to listen to her father. Could she not boil some beets? and he would send in a steak for dinner, and—was there anything else?

Jamie stayed at home all the morning and helped to amuse Freddy. Bessie at-

How Bessie Kept House

tended to her sleeping rooms, and then went to the kitchen. After washing the dishes she concluded to try making some cookies. They would be so good to eat this afternoon when the girls came.

She had often helped her mother on baking days, but it was somewhat different to plan everything for herself. Bessie was not quite as wise as she fancied, though she often imagined that she could improve upon her mother's ways. She poured in her milk without any measurement, and then had to use more flour, making twice the quantity of dough that she meant to. She could not remember whether she had put in salt or not, and, without thinking to taste, ran for some more. They were rolled out, cut, and placed in the pans.

“I'll make a cake of the rest,” she said

How Bessie Kept House

to herself. "I can't bother cutting out so much."

She put them in the oven and began to tidy up her kitchen. What a sight of work there was to do, after all! Beans to shell and Dick had asked for mashed potatoes. Oh, her cookies must be done!

They were hard and dried, but not the beautiful brown that she was accustomed to see. What could be the matter? There was a good fire—oh, she had never turned the damper! How could she have forgotten it? Well, she would try the others. As for these—they might as well be cannon balls. She would not say anything about them, but soak them and give them to the chickens. A little flour was of no account. She turned the damper, and the rest baked very nicely. Then

How Bessie Kept House

she put in her cake, and was so busy with potatoes, beans, and the dinner table that she never thought to look until her dishes were washed. The cake was a cinder, of course, and the pan would have to be scoured before it met her mother's eyes. But as the girls were coming, she would not do it now.

Mr. Collins had taken the two boys with him, so Bessie thought she would dress up for her company. There was a pretty lawn dress that her mother was rather choice of, but, then, if it did get crumpled, she could iron it out again. To be sure, her calico was clean, but this was the prettiest, and ruffled. She would be very careful.

Carrie came first. She was a bright, droll girl, who could talk broken Irish and Dutch, and mimicked every one to

How Bessie Kept House

the life. She came up to Bessie's room and inspected everything. When Sophie and Mary came, Bessie ran down, leaving her there.

“Let us go out in the barn and have a good romp,” said Mary. “It is such fun climbing over the hay. And we can do nothing much in-doors.”

“Agreed. I like it much the best,” declared Bessie. “Come, Carrie!” she called.

The visitor ran down presently, and said in a breathless way that she had been looking out of every window. There was a great fragrance of cologne about her, and Bessie mistrusted at once that she had been helping herself.

They did have a gay time, sure enough. Carrie said and did everything funny, but somehow Bessie did not feel quite at



How Bessie Kept House.

“CAN'T YOU MEND IT?”



How Bessie Kept House

ease. The amusement did not seem to go down to the bottom of her heart and satisfy. And as she was scrambling about, her dress caught on something. Oh, the fearful rent! Just above the ruffle, where it never could be mended, for it was drawn all out of shape. She might have known—why *did* she wear it out here to play in the hay?

“It’s dreadful, isn’t it? Will your mother scold? Can’t you mend it? Oh, what a dreadful tear!”

Their fun was spoiled then. They came down very soberly and returned to the house, looked over some books, and then declared they must go home. Bessie forgot about the cookies that she was going to treat them with. She had a good cry as they went out of the gate, then she took her dress off and looked at

How Bessie Kept House

it. No, it never *could* be mended. The whole breadth, too. If it only had torn anywhere else.

Presently a bright thought came into Bessie's head. Her mother had taught her to sew very nicely; indeed, not being able to keep a servant, Bessie was made her chief assistant. She hunted up her mother's piece bag, and, oh, joy! there was a large piece, enough for a new breadth. If she could get it in before her mother's return.

She began to rip it out, but, being sewed with a machine, it was slow work. Her father came home, there was supper to get, the boys to wash and put to bed, and then she took a lamp to her room, but ere long her father called to know if she had gone to bed, and why her light was burning.

How Bessie Kept House

She wiped away a few tears and went to bed.

“Who broke my cologne bottle?” asked Dick, the next morning. “Jamie, was it your work?”

“No, it wasn’t. I haven’t been in your room.”

BESSIE'S SEVERE LESSON

CHAPTER III

BESSIE'S SEVERE LESSON

“IT was not you, Bessie? It looks as if some one had hit it to loosen the stopper and broken the neck off. The cologne is nearly all spilled, but the bottle is standing upright, so it could not have been the cat.”

“What a strange thing! Jamie, don't tell any story about it,” said his father, sternly.

“I didn't, father. I haven't touched it. Please do believe me.”

“I can guess how it happened,” Bessie said, in great confusion. “Carrie Lanham called yesterday, and I took her to my room while I was dressing. Then the

How Bessie Kept House

Lewis girls ran over, and I came down, expecting she would follow. When she did come down, she was very sweet with cologne, but I thought she had been using mine.”

“I wish you would keep your girls out of my room,” said Dick, crossly.

“I did not know she went there. It was very ill-bred. But, Dick, I will give you my bottle,” Bessie said, in so deprecating a tone that Dick was conquered.

“Isn’t that the girl mother doesn’t like, Bessie? Don’t ever ask her here.”

“No, I will not,” Bessie answered. “She cannot be real good or she would not have done such a thing.”

Every spare moment of the morning poor Bessie worked upon her dress, but what with the boys and the dinner there

How Bessie Kept House

were so many interruptions. As soon as she could get the dishes out of the way she took her dress over to Mrs. Lewis to ask her to sew up the breadths and stitch the ruffles on.

“I am so glad you could do it,” said Bessie.

“You are a very ingenious little girl,” remarked Mrs. Lewis. “How fortunate that you had some lawn like it. But you ought to have known better than to play in such a delicate dress.”

Bessie expressed her thanks with a great sense of relief. When she reached home, she ironed it out and hung it in the wardrobe, then finished putting her house in order, and had just time to dress herself and go to meet her mother.

How glad Bessie was to see her.

How Bessie Kept House

Housekeeping had not been so very delightful, after all. She was worried and anxious, and seemed to have a load at her heart, and the tears came into her eyes as her mother kissed her.

“Grandma is better, dear, and I have had a nice visit. She wants you to come and stay a week, and I promised you should. Are they all well, and did you keep house nicely? I have thought of you half the time.”

“Pretty well,” Bessie answered, soberly.

“And there is father, too, come to meet us. Run on, Lotty, dear, and catch him.”

Mrs. Collins was escorted to the house in a triumphant procession, and Mr. Collins declared that Bessie had been the nicest little housekeeper in the world, and

How Bessie Kept House

that mother might go again; but Bessie felt as if she never wanted to be left alone with household cares.

When Dick came home to supper, he put a square white parcel on her plate. He was a little sorry for his crossness that morning.

“Oh,” she cried, “a book! And *Little Women!* Dear Dick—”

“She deserved it, mother. She has kept house like an old woman, and nothing has been behindhand.”

Bessie ran out of the room to cry a little. She felt so sorry for the things they could not know—the dreadful things she never should have the courage to confess. But she never would touch Dick’s books again without permission, and as for Carrie Lanham—

“What is in this jar?” asked her

How Bessie Kept House

mother, as they were putting away the tea things. "Oh, cookies! Why—"

"I made them yesterday, mamma, but they were not—very good—"

"Pretty salt," said her mother, with a grimace, "but they will do for the children."

That evening Bessie took out the stockings.

"So you did not even find time to darn the stockings, Bessie," her mother began, merrily. "Yet sometimes you think there cannot be much to do, and during these three days there was no washing, ironing, or baking, and no baby to look after; but I dare say you found enough to keep you pretty busy."

"I am afraid I did not improve it in the beginning," Bessie returned, gravely.

How Bessie Kept House

“But I shall never think again that it is so very easy to do.”

“You succeeded very well,” said her mother. “And as a reward you shall have a nice, pleasant week at Grandma’s. Aunt Lucy will be glad to have you.”

There was a great lump in Bessie’s throat, but she had not the courage to speak, and afternoon came so soon. Her mother laid out her pretty lawn dress, and her father took her to the station and gave her into the conductor’s charge. But Bessie’s heart was not as light as it should have been for a little girl who was going to make a pleasant visit.

Bessie had a delightful visit with her Aunt Lucy. Grandmother was just beginning to sit up a little, and she was a very pleasant old lady to wait upon. She

How Bessie Kept House

read aloud from an entertaining book, sewed a little, and had one tea-party with some neighboring girls.

“How much you have improved!” her Aunt Lucy would say. “How thoughtful you are! What a help your mother must find you!”

Bessie would flush at this praise and feel that she did not deserve it. If she only could make Aunt Lucy stop!

I said in the beginning that Bessie was not a persistently deceitful girl. She sometimes did naughty things and let them “blow over,” as people say; but they always troubled her, and made her much more conscientious while they were in her mind. And the pretty lawn dress that she put on every afternoon kept it all fresh. She was very glad she had succeeded in repairing it, and there was

How Bessie Kept House

no real harm done anywhere, only she had not been trusty nor truthful, nor kind to Freddy. It wasn't at all likely any of it would come to light, but she wished it never had happened.

The next Saturday Dick came over, and on Monday morning he took her home. School was to begin, so she could only kiss her mother and the children and run away; but her mother had looked up her books and her lunch-box.

That afternoon she said to Bessie—

“Did you see anything of a handsome piece of thread lace, Bessie, that I have been wearing in my silk dress? I did it up the very day I went to Grandmother's, and laid it in the top of my drawer. I was in a hurry, and so did not stop to put it in my lace-box.”

“No,” said Bessie, slowly.

How Bessie Kept House

“You did not go to the drawer for anything?”

“I am sure I did not.”

“Well, it is strange. I would not care so much, but it was expensive, and that for my sleeves matched. Still, I may have mislaid it.”

Bessie felt warm and confused. She remembered now that Carrie Lanham had been accused at school of being “light-fingered.” She had lingered in the rooms after Bessie came down, and said she had been looking out of every window. Of course she had broken Dick’s beautiful cologne bottle, but she surely could not have had the face to steal—that was just it. Oh, if she only had not asked her to come! Her mother had often said, “I would so much rather have you ask girls in when I am home

How Bessie Kept House

than when I am out, Bessie''; but the little girl had been so intent upon suiting herself those few days.

She asked Carrie Lanham at recess next morning, in a rather confused and delicate maner to be sure, but Carrie was very indignant, and denied "up and down," as the children say.

"But you did break Dick's cologne bottle," Bessie exclaimed, decisively. "No one else was in the room; and you came down drenched with cologne."

"It's no such thing! You are the meanest girl I ever heard of, Bessie Collins! I would not be hired to step in your house again, and I won't speak to you this whole term; you see if I do."

Bessie went to her seat and dropped a few quiet tears over her book. Her mother knew best, of course. She

How Bessie Kept House

thought her so strict, so almost queer at times, and yet it was wisest, no doubt. *Her* judgment had not brought about very good results, she had to confess. If she only could have found her mother's beautiful lace; but it never came to light.

“Have you read the book I gave you?” Dick asked one evening when they were in the kitchen making candy. “But of course you have, and it's just splendid, isn't it?”

Bessie's eyes dropped and her brow flushed, for her cheeks were red as roses before.

“I—I—no, I haven't,” she answered, with much confusion.

“Why?” and Dick's bright face was full of disappointment. “Didn't you like to have it, or had you read it before?”

How Bessie Kept House

“Neither — and I was glad — only I did not deserve it, and I am waiting—”

There Bessie broke down into a good cry.

“You foolish little girl! It is all about that broken bottle. I was cross at first with you, but I felt sorry, and you were so good—”

“No, I wasn’t,” Bessie interrupted. “I wish you would let me tell you all, Dick; and maybe you had better take the book until some time when I am better.”

Dick looked up in astonishment. Was Bessie the author of the mischief, and had she told a falsehood?

“Well?” Dick answered.

So Bessie related her first morning’s temptation, and how she had taken out

How Bessie Kept House

the bureau drawers to get the hidden story.

“Mother told me to lock up any books I might have lying around. I would not have thought it of you, Bess, but, oh! don’t cry, it wasn’t so very bad, and you did not tell any story.”

“Yes, I told one to Freddy to account for having the drawer out, and acted one when you found your clothes so different, for somehow, when you begin—”

Ah, Bessie, it is well to learn about the “tangled web” early in life, if so be that it brings wisdom.

“Oh, Bess, how lucky the bottle did not break—the one in the drawer, I mean. It had nitric acid in it. I was taking out a wart with it, and it would have eaten everything to pieces wherever it dropped. It wasn’t a nice thing to do, to be sure,

How Bessie Kept House

but I know you are sorry, and I don't believe you ever would do it again. You see, you are so fond of reading, and mother doesn't think it right to waste so much time; that is why I lock up my books."

"But you need never again, Dick. And I was punishing myself, because I did want to read the book so much."

"You are a brave little girl after all. Now we will make up, splendid, good friends, and shake hands. You are never to touch anything in my room that you think mother or I would not like you to have, and I will not need to put things out of sight. There, I'll trust you until you tell me that you have broken your word, which I hope will never be. And now I want you to begin *Little Women* just as soon as you have leisure."

How Bessie Kept House

With that they kissed each other and went on with the candy making, Bessie feeling quite light of heart. The candy was a success, too, and Bessie ran out of doors a few minutes to cool her burning eyes before she went into the next room, where her mother sat sewing while her father read his paper. They ate all the candy they wanted, and left some for the children who were in bed.

BESSIE'S
"HIGHER HOUSEKEEPING"

CHAPTER IV

BESSIE'S "HIGHER HOUSEKEEPING"

THE next day Cousin Jane sent word that she was coming over for a visit, and when Bessie came home from school there she found her in her favorite window, her pincushion, her box of spools and odds and ends, and her scissors lying on the window sill; her patchwork bag hung on one corner of the chair and her knitting bag on the other. Right in front of her lay a pile of calico, and on the lap-board she was sorting and doing up.

"There, Bessie," she began, as soon as she had answered the child's greeting, "I've been cutting up the bundles of

How Bessie Kept House

pieces, and here are half enough blocks for a new quilt. I am so sorry I did not come over in vacation, for you might have sewed it instead of cantering all over as girls do now-a-days. Why, when I was twelve years old I had four bed quilts of my own pieced, and had knit my own stockings for I can't tell how long. I never went to school a day after that."

Mrs. Collins glanced up to catch Bessie's eye, and quietly entreat her not to answer her back sharply, but Bessie only said with a little laugh:

"Girls are not so smart now-a-days, Cousin Jane."

"That's true enough, true enough. But *you* might improve your time. There's so many to keep at you that I'm sure you have no excuse. And your mother was brought up in the old-fashioned way.

How Bessie Kept House

Lotty, let those things alone! Now I hope you are not going to waste this whole afternoon, Bessie.”

“Oh, no, indeed! I have stacks of lessons to learn. I go up in mother’s room, where it is quiet, for that,” and putting away her lunch box, she left the room, while Cousin Jane was descanting on the folly of studying so many things and wasting so much time.

That evening Bessie brought out her stockings. Dick was making ready to crack some butternuts, and a plate of rosy apples stood on the table.

“There now, Elizabeth,” said Cousin Jane, “I would have darned those stockings this afternoon if you had given them to me.”

“Bessie takes a certain share in the household work,” replied her mother,

How Bessie Kept House

“and I like to have her do it, unless something especial prevents.”

Cousin Jane looked them over to see if Bessie did them well, but she could find no fault. Afterward Bessie brought out a tidy she was crocheting, but as this did not, in the elder lady's estimation, come under the head of strictly useful and necessary things, there was a small lecture, which Bessie took very sweetly.

“Bessie,” her mother said, the following morning, “Mrs. Strong and her sister are coming to tea to-night, and I sent word for them to bring Addie. Come home as soon as you can.”

“How good of you, mother!” and Bessie clasped her arms fondly about her mother's neck.

“Elizabeth, I am afraid you are spoiling that child. They see enough of girls

How Bessie Kept House

at school and everywhere, and this having company makes them too much like big folks. It isn't a good plan, and you'll find it so in the end."

Bessie flushed and wanted very much to answer, but met her mother's entreating eyes and smiled instead.

She and Addie and Dick had a splendid time that evening out in the kitchen popping corn and laughing, though Cousin Jane laid every little inattention that occurred for the next three days to the fact of having so much company.

But presently the visit came to an end, though Bessie gratified Cousin Jane by sewing two evenings on the patchwork, and promising to persevere until it was finished.

"I think my little daughter deserves much credit for being so pleasant and

How Bessie Kept House

good-tempered," Mrs. Collins said, the next afternoon when they were alone. "Cousin Jane *is* trying, but she means well, and her spectacles are not of the modern sort, so we must excuse her."

"Mamma, how much you have praised me lately!"

"Bessie, how good and thoughtful you have been lately," her mother said, in almost the same tone, at which they both laughed. "Ever since you were at your grandmother's."

"It wasn't that," Bessie returned, flushing.

"Was it your experience at house-keeping, then?"

"Yes, mamma, it was, though I was n't half as good as you all thought. And it was dreadful?"

"Dick nor your father never made any

How Bessie Kept House

complaints, and I found the house in pretty good order, except that you almost burnt up one of my baking tins.”

“I was going to scour it, but I forgot. That was not the worst, though.”

“Don’t you want to tell me all about it?” her mother asked, in a soft, coaxing tone. “Though I cannot think it was very bad or I should have made some discoveries before this.”

“I would like to, mamma, for I am quite sure that I should never do any of the things again. I used to think it would be so nice to have *my* way, and it did not seem necessary to work all the time, and—”

“You thought you were wiser than I. No uncommon thing for a little girl. I believe I was once troubled with the same complaint myself. But now for the

How Bessie Kept House

story. After I was out of the house you—”

Bessie took it up and went on bravely, though her cheeks were crimson, and the tears came to her eyes. She could n't see how she had ever been so deceitful and untrustworthy. Perhaps her mother was a little astonished, too, but she saw how genuine Bessie's sorrow was, and understood how patiently she had worked out her own amendment. So she drew her to her bosom and kissed her tenderly.

“There are a good many just such hard lessons for us to learn through life,” she said, kindly. “Older people are wiser because they have had more experience, and have learned the result of wrong doing. So they try to warn their children, you see. I do not wish to deny you any indulgence, Bessie, that it

How Bessie Kept House

would be better for you to have, unless it comes at a time to interfere with necessary work. I give up many pleasures for my children's sake, and try to ask them to give up only a few for mine. And since we are not rich we must all help each other, which will make the work light. Besides, I want to guard you against selfishness and all its attendant evils. But I think you have learned your lesson pretty well. Like Dick, I shall not feel afraid to trust you again."

"If you could only have your pretty lace back! Oh, mamma, how can anybody—"

"One sin waits upon another. And now, little daughter, we will see how much we can help one another in the future, and you must believe that I am

How Bessie Kept House

always thinking and planning for your best.”

“I am sure I shall, forever and ever, mamma,” and she kissed her with warmth and sincerity.

“I think you have learned a little about the higher housekeeping,” mamma continued, softly,—“Keep thy heart.”

LAURA'S LESSON

LAURA'S LESSON

“O H, dear!” Laura Preston sighed, impatiently, “there’s the baby awake again! I do wish I could have a little time like the other girls! They’re all going to Bell Cummings’s to play croquet, and I meant to ask you if I couldn’t go.”

Laura’s voice choked over a sob. It was hard to stay in the house all this beautiful weather, to know what fun the girls were having, and she out of it all, taking care of this tiresome baby. She wished there were no such things as babies in the world. Saturday, she had

Laura's Lesson

to give up Annie Graham's little tea-party; Monday afternoon, she had a pretty book, that had to be returned the next day, and he wouldn't let her read a line—here it was Wednesday, and it seemed to her that she had done nothing but take care of him for the last month.

“If you could take him in the carriage—he'd be so much better for a change in the open air.”

Mrs. Preston uttered this timidly. She was so ill and worn, and looked so tired, that, at any other time, her little daughter's heart would have been moved with pity.

“But I couldn't go there, and I shouldn't want to; they'd all call me nurse-maid. I don't see why Ann can't find some time to take care of the baby. She used to, I'm sure.”

Laura's Lesson

“My being sick has made so much more work, you know.”

At this the baby gave a cry. Laura jerked him up from the cradle, and then he screamed.

“You're a little crosspatch.”

“Bring him to me,” said her mother.

Laura felt a little ashamed then, and cuddled him up between her face and neck, and began to whisper softly to him. He was very sleepy, and soon shut his eyes.

“I guess he will go to sleep again,” she said, in a gentler tone, and began walking up and down the room. Yet all the time she was thinking of the bright sunshine, and the smooth, velvety lawn where the girls were going to play croquet.

“Mother,” she said, presently,

Laura's Lesson

“couldn't we have some one come and take care of the baby while you are so poorly? There's Jenny Briggs out of a place.”

“Mrs. Sayre said Jenny was very careless; that she wouldn't trust her with a baby. I think I shall be better soon. It is real hard for you; I'm sorry.”

Something in her mother's voice touched Laura, but she was not in a mood to be very tender. Of course, it was hard to have to stay in the house all the time, and give up everything.

She laid the baby back in his crib, and gave another longing glance out of the window.

“I think you might go,” her mother said, presently; “it's only four now, and if you could be back by a little after five.

Laura's Lesson

Jamie ought to take a good long nap; he hasn't slept hardly any to-day."

"Oh! I should like to so much."

Laura's conscience checked her. She felt that she ought to stay in the house, in case she might be needed; but there was Ann downstairs, and if the baby would sleep!

"Yes, you can go."

Mrs. Preston felt that Laura had been confined a great deal lately, and the frowning face did not promise very pleasant companionship. However, it cleared up wonderfully now.

"Oh! thank you, mamma! I'll be back real early."

Laura ran upstairs, and slipped on her white dress. Ann had begged her to save it nice for another Sunday, "the ruffles were so botherin' to iron"; but it

Laura's Lesson

was the very ruffles that she liked. Then she gave her hair a brush, tied on her blue sash, and went down. She ought to go in and kiss poor, pale mamma; but then she might wake the baby. So she stole softly along, lingering a moment on the porch. Was that sound the little rascal Jamie waking up again? No, she guessed not, and down the walk she ran.

They had played one game when she reached Bell's handsome house. She was very glad that she had dressed herself so prettily, for here were Bell's cousins, and Mrs. Cummings and some lady visitors were looking on.

"I'm so glad you've come!" exclaimed Bell; "we had to take that stupid Sarah Gaines, who hardly knows a mallet from a bean-pole. Now, we'll have some fun."

Laura's Lesson

“It’s your day out, I suppose, Laura,” drawled Bessie Livingston. “I heard that you’d turned child’s nurse.”

That vexed Laura, and a heat flashed to her face.

“I take care of my little brother sometimes,” she said, haughtily; yet she wished in her heart that she didn’t have it to do.

“Come, Blue, run to your place!” said Bell.

They all went at it in great earnest. Laura was a capital player, generally, but this afternoon her hand didn’t seem very steady. She lost her patience easily; she felt flurried, and nervous, and warm, and found she was on the losing side. And then there was an uncomfortable misgiving tugging at her heart. If the baby should wake, if Ann

Laura's Lesson

was busy or out, and poor mamma *did* look unusually pale! She might have guessed that mamma had been worrying with the baby all day, when she said he had not slept any; but just then she did not want to think of any one besides herself. And now, she couldn't help thinking, and the balls became confused in her mind.

Until ten months before, Laura Preston had been an only child, and, of course, indulged a good deal. She seemed so sweet and good-tempered always, but it was because there had been nothing to try her. At first, she pronounced the baby splendid, and cared for nothing else—tended him, caressed him, did yards of tatting, crocheted him a blanket and a cap, and worked him a little skirt. Then her interest began to

Laura's Lesson

flag; he took so much time, and was really a great deal of trouble.

For the last month, Mrs. Preston had been quite poorly, and the baby a greater charge. Laura grew tired of him, she secretly confessed to herself, though it did seem wicked. But it *was* hard to give up every moment.

Mrs. Preston saw with pain that Laura was developing many selfish and unamiable traits. Sometimes she wondered whether it would be best to relieve her of all charge of the baby, or persevere until she had learned one of the hard lessons of life, to think of others for something besides pleasure. Yet, to do Laura justice, she had never been quite so cross as on this day.

She didn't enjoy the playing half as much as she expected. Bell thought she

Laura's Lesson

wasn't trying at all, and did not care how she played, and presently the game came to an end. Laura said she must go home, but Bell begged her to come in and see her new dresses.

“How beautifully yours is made!” Mrs. Cummings said. “Bell, Miss Lang must see this waist; I'd like one of yours puffed in that fashion.”

So Bell took her into the dressmaker, and, somehow, the time passed rapidly. The clock struck six.

“Oh! I must go”; and Laura made a fresh start.

Flying out of the gate, her skirt caught, and, in her haste, she couldn't stop, so her beautiful dress, that she was so glad of having worn five minutes ago, now had a great, unsightly rent across one breadth.

Laura's Lesson

Laura uttered a passionate cry, more in anger than sorrow. The whole day had gone wrong, for that matter; but, first, a little girl had not been quite right in heart.

The doctor's carriage was standing before the door. He generally came in the morning, and a sudden fear seized the child. There was one of the neighbors with little Jamie in her arms.

“Oh!” she said; “mamma—!”

“Hush! dear—mamma is much worse; she has been bleeding at the lungs. This great baby is altogether too much for her; the doctor says she must have a nurse.”

Poor Laura! She seemed turning to stone. If she had not gone out!—and now, if mamma died, it would be all her fault.

Laura's Lesson

Jamie held out his dimpled hands with a smile. It seemed then as if her heart would break. Two hours ago she had thought him such a trial, and would have felt relieved if there had been no Jamie in the world—he loved her so much, too. She hid her face in his dress, and wept bitterly.

“Don't cry, dear; she isn't dangerous. I don't exactly know, but if she keeps quiet, and isn't worried, she will get well again. Poor sister! tell her not to cry, Jamie.”

Jamie patted the soft, curly head, and said, “Ta-ta,” as if he would comfort her. But Laura's heart was so full that she ran off to her room, and buried her face in the pillow of her own little bed, wanting to beg God not to punish her as she deserved, but afraid even to pray.

Laura's Lesson

Presently, some one called her; it was Ann's voice, and, changing her dress, she went to the kitchen.

“Oh, Miss Laura!” and Ann stopped, as she saw the pale, tear-stained face and swollen eyes.

“When was mamma taken so bad?” she asked.

“About an hour ago. The baby's been very troublesome all day, and he's a heavy lift for a sick woman. I was going to ask you to do some errands, Miss Laura, but if you'll set the table, I'll go.”

Laura was glad enough to do anything. Before she was through, the doctor went away, and Mrs. Brown came out with the baby. Then Laura heard a quick, familiar step. She waited with a beating heart; but Ann returned, finished

Laura's Lesson

preparing the supper, and yet papa had not left the room. Baby began to worry, and Laura took him. When the dear little arms tightened round her neck, the quick tears rushed to her eyes again. How could she have thought him a trouble, and been glad to get away!

When Mr. Preston came in, he kissed Laura and Babie Jamie, asleep on her shoulder. She couldn't eat or hardly speak, but listened to Mrs. Brown and papa. They didn't seem to think Mrs. Preston so very ill, but Laura really was afraid she would die before morning—and what if she never kissed her again! Then she remembered how she had slipped away in the afternoon, and her heart smote her bitterly enough.

A long while after, everything in the

Laura's Lesson

house was quiet—baby sleeping soundly in his crib, Mrs. Brown and the nurse in Mrs. Preston's room, and Ann gone to bed—only poor Laura sitting in the kitchen alone.

“My dear child!” her father said, entering the room.

“Oh, papa!” She sprang up, and was clasped to his breast.

“Hush! my darling. Mamma is very comfortable, and not in any danger. All she needs is good care. She has worried too much with the baby, but we will have a nurse for him.”

“Oh, papa! that is what I want to talk about. I've been so wicked; I don't know as anyone can ever forgive me, and if mamma had died, I should always have felt as if I had killed her.”

Laura's Lesson

“Why, my child!” Mr. Preston began, in astonishment.

“Yes, I ought to have stayed and taken care of the baby. I knew mamma was weak and sick, though she didn't say that she had worried with him all day; but it seemed to me that I hadn't been anywhere for ever and ever so long, and I did want to play croquet with the girls. I didn't enjoy hardly a moment of it, though, and now I am so sorry that I went.”

Laura's voice broke down entirely then, and she was sobbing in her father's arms.

“My little girl,” he said, gravely, “this is a hard lesson, indeed. It is doubtful if mamma would have been quite so bad if she had not overtasked herself; but the doctor said the bleeding

Laura's Lesson

was not from her lungs, and that it is really better she should give up, and have good care taken of her. We shall have a nurse for Master Jamie. I proposed this some time ago, but mamma thought it was best for you to have some little charge of him, seeing that he was your only brother. But it does confine you very much, so long as she is not well. Only, my little daughter ought to learn to think for others, or she will be in danger of growing up a selfish, unamiable woman."

"Oh, papa! I don't believe I ever shall forget again," sobbed Laura. "And if mamma gets well—"

"I think she will. Let us both pray earnestly."

Laura did not ask to see mamma that night. She determined to bear bravely

Laura's Lesson

the punishment she had brought upon herself, and she prayed a long while that she might be kept purer in heart, and learn to be unselfish.

She did not forget the next morning. Laura was a neat, handy little girl, and could do a great deal when she chose. She helped Ann now, and took care of her brother in such a pretty, winsome manner, that Ann quite forgot the scolding she meant to give her—for the maid felt herself one of the family, she had been with them so long.

Laura was glad at last to be able to go in and see her mamma. They had a tender talk about the incidents of the day before, and Mrs. Preston felt satisfied that they would make a lasting impression upon her.

I do not mean that Laura was alto-

Laura's Lesson

gether perfect after that, for everyone has to try daily and hourly as long as he or she lives; but she tried to think of others, and to make them happy, and she found, as people always do, that she was the happier for it herself.

Mrs. Preston recovered, to Laura's unbounded delight. They had a nurse for Jamie, but the little rogue thought his sister much to be preferred, and Mrs. Preston was thankful to see so cheerful a spirit growing up within her. If ever she felt tempted to fret, or felt a frown rising to her sunny brow, she tried to check it immediately by remembering the sad night she had passed when mamma was so ill.

Ann could not help scolding about the torn dress, and Laura took it very

Laura's Lesson

meekly. It was part of her lesson, she admitted—the one all children have to learn—that their own way may not be the best, even if they can be indulged in it.

JESSIE'S DOLLAR

7—*How Bessie Kept House.*

JESSIE'S DOLLAR

“**T**HERE’S something to buy sugar-plums with,” Uncle Mark said, with a good-by to his little niece Jessie.

She kissed him and gave him a good, hard hug, by way of showing her gratitude. After he had gone, she opened her hand and smoothed out the rumpled note. It was a dollar.

Jessie Marsh was used to having considerable spending - money. Uncles, aunts, and cousins kept her pretty well supplied. She was one of those bright, merry girls who are always smiling and

Jessie's Dollar

happy, and a great favorite with everybody—ready to do a favor, hold a skein of yarn for grandmother, look up her papa's slippers, and run upstairs or downstairs for a misplaced or forgotten article. Perhaps this was why she received so many gifts of one kind and another; for even visitors at the house always went away with a pleasant remembrance of cheerful, obliging Jessie.

Mr. Marsh was in very comfortable circumstances, and extremely indulgent to his little daughter. She was the only girl, and there were four boys in the family. If Jessie expressed a wish for a book or a toy, he always brought it home to her. I am sorry to say that Jessie was rather careless and extravagant. To be sure she made glad many a child's heart by gifts of her playthings when she was

Jessie's Dollar

done with them, but she tired of them very soon and wanted new. Pennies, quarters, and even half-dollars, often went for some trifle that presently lost interest for her. Mrs. Marsh tried to check this fault in her daughter, but her father generally came to the rescue.

“Let her take her own pleasure with the money,” he would say. “I dislike to see children mean and parsimonious.”

But Mrs. Marsh took every occasion to direct Jessie, although her advice was not always followed.

Jessie was still holding her dollar in her hand, as her mother re-entered the room.

“See what Uncle Mark gave me—to buy sugar-plums with, he said,” and a radiant smile illumined Jessie's face.

Jessie's Dollar

“And only yesterday you were wishing for a dollar,” her mother replied.

The smile faded a little at that. Jessie had been listening to a poor woman's story the day before. Mrs. Marsh had given her some sewing, as she was very anxious to earn enough money to pay her rent. Counting up what she was likely to get from one and another, left her still a dollar or two short. Ordinarily, Mrs. Marsh would have overpaid her, but now she had a mind to put Jessie's generosity to the test. The little girl had been quite thoughtful for some time after Mrs. Adams's departure, and at last had said:

“Oh, mamma! I wish I had a dollar; I should give it to Mrs. Adams. How hard it must be to earn money enough to take care of herself and those three little children!”

Jessie's Dollar

“Yes,” her mother answered, gravely. “We ought to be thankful that God has placed us above want.”

Jessie went to her bank. It never had a very large surplus on hand. Twenty cents—that was not near a dollar! So she gave a little sigh.

This was what her mother's words recalled. She looked rather sober over it for several moments.

“A dollar is a good deal for a little girl to give away,” she said, slowly, as the result of her thoughts.

“It did not seem so yesterday. It is often easier to be charitable with that which we do not possess.”

“One can't give them when one hasn't anything,” Jessie said; and the absurdity made her smile a little.

“And it is unfortunate not to have

Jessie's Dollar

the heart and the money at the same time.”

Jessie did not reply. It was nearly schooltime; so she hunted up her hood, her squirrel tippet and muff, and her good, warm cloak. She had never suffered from any cold or neglect, and there was a sudden rush of gratitude in her heart, for it was a sweet, true, and tender heart.

“Good-by, mamma,” and she came to kiss her. Then she strapped her books together and hung them on her arm and ran down the path.

Should she give Mrs. Adams her dollar? There were so many things that she wanted. She just halted at Warner's store-window. There was a box of paints that were only a dollar—she had made two or three ineffectual attempts

Jessie's Dollar

to save up her money and get them. And there was a crying baby with the loveliest blue eyes. Her dolly was past the crying stage—she would just go in and price this one—it was such fun to have the squeaking little thing! “Seventy-five cents.” It was a beauty. And there was a lovely toy in the shape of a pretty carved egg-cup, with an egg in it. When you touched a spring in the bottom, the upper half of the egg flew off, and the prettiest little fairy made you a bow. That was a dollar. And a drawing-slate, with such a charming variety of landscapes, castles, birds, flowers, and nearly everything. Oh! what beautiful things one could buy with a dollar!

“Will you take this baby?” and the shopwoman made it cry like a real live

Jessie's Dollar

baby, and all the while there was such a roguish look in its blue eyes.

“Not just now,” Jessie said, faintly, and turned away.

“Oh! you like this cup better”; and then the woman made the fairy spring up so suddenly that Jessie jumped, too. How she could startle the boys with it!

“I won't take any of them now,” Jessie said, with sudden determination, and then went out. She had to run to school to be there in time.

At recess, Martha Lee displayed a beautiful rubber ring with a pearl in it. It looked so pretty on her white, slender fingers.

“It cost just a dollar,” she said, “and I saved up all my pennies to buy it.” Then she let Jessie try it on. The boys had made Jessie several rings, but they

Jessie's Dollar

had not the smooth finish of this. And then the pearl!

“I mean to have one,” exclaimed Bell Anders; “I’ve about seventy cents saved up.”

Jessie looked at her finger and decided that she wanted one, also. To be sure, there was her pretty birthday ring, with rubies, but that wasn’t black. The pearl looked so lovely in the jetty setting.

Poor Jessie! By the time she had gone home to dinner and come back again, Warner’s store seemed as full of treasures as the magic cave, and there were so many things that cost just a dollar. Her money was fast burning a hole in her pocket. It seems strange that it should have this faculty, but it does appear to produce a curious kind of combustion. Did you ever feel your fingers

Jessie's Dollar

tingle and burn when you touched three or four pennies in your pocket, and could you not almost taste the delightful taffy-candy that the little old woman, two doors from the school, sold?

Mrs. Adams' pale face and troubled eyes interfered with Jessie's peace of mind. She certainly thought yesterday that if she had a dollar she would give it to her. Why did she not want to now?

"Clara Adams hasn't been to school to-day," Miss Trusdell said. "Who goes near her house?"

Jessie swallowed a great lump that seemed to rush up from her heart.

"I'll call, Miss Trusdell."

"Thank you, Jessie. Clara ought not miss a day. I am afraid she is sick."

So Jessie went around by another path, almost afraid to pass Warner's again.

Jessie's Dollar

It was a cold December day, cloudy now, and with the appearance of snow. The wind nipped Jessie's rosy cheeks, but she did not mind. Here was the little cottage—rather cold and forlorn-looking, it must be confessed. Jamie answered her tap at the door.

“Oh! come in, Miss Jessie!” Mrs. Adams exclaimed; and Jamie shut the door quickly, so the biting air would not rush in.

“I called to see why Clara wasn't at school to-day,” Jessie said.

Clara blushed. Mrs. Adams looked rather troubled.

“You're not sick?”

“No, Miss Jessie, it wasn't that. But Clara hasn't any shoes. She would freeze her feet in those old ones; besides they're out to the ground.”

Jessie's Dollar

Jessie cast a furtive glance at them—old and shabby, indeed. She thought of her own half-worn boots, but although Clara was a smaller girl, her feet were larger than Jessie's. No, that would not do.

“I ordered her a pair at Mr. Gregg's, and they're done, only he will not let me have them until I pay down a little. And I've just money enough for my rent, which is due to-morrow. Mr. Dallas is a hard landlord.”

“Then you have all the money?”
Jessie said, gladly.

“Yes, I am thankful for that; but Clara must wait until next week. I shall have to earn some more.”

Jessie talked to Jamie and Charley quite a while, and listened to the praises of her own dear mamma, who was always

Jessie's Dollar

doing a kind turn for everybody. And a plan came into her mind; but then she could not have a crying doll, nor a paint-box, nor any of those charming toys that she half coveted. She said good-by to them presently, and went straight to Mr. Gregg's.

A woman in a faded shawl was standing by the untidy counter. She had been binding some shoes, and brought them home.

"I can't give it to you, because I haven't a cent in the place," Mr. Gregg was saying. "People won't pay me, and I can't pay others."

"But we actually haven't anything in the house—not a mouthful of dinner even"; and here the poor woman's tremulous voice broke down.

Jessie felt like crying, too; but she

Jessie's Dollar

winked away the tears with a great effort. Then she asked Mr. Gregg about Clara's shoes.

"There they are," he said, rather brusquely, and nodded his head toward a stout pair standing on a little shelf. "Good, strong ones, too, and dirt cheap, yet they can't pay for them. I'm done trusting; it's a poor plan, and keeps me like a beggar."

Then he hammered spitefully upon his lapstone, and looked savage. He was a surly old fellow.

"Will you let her have them if I give you a dollar now, and promise to pay the rest if they can't?" Jessie asked, bravely.

"Yes, Miss."

Out came Jessie's dollar. Spent for a pair of coarse shoes that had not a bit of

Jessie's Dollar

beauty or grace, like the fairy or the doll, or twenty other things.

The poor woman approached again.

“Oh, Mr. Gregg—”

“Well, take it,” he said, ungraciously.

The thin fingers clutched it nervously, and she almost stared at Jessie.

“Will you send them down to Mrs. Adams, to-night? I’ll ask papa for the rest of the money. How much is it?”

“Only a dollar. Cheap enough, I must say; but I work for about nothing.”

When Jessie was in the fresh air, trying to breathe out the smell of wet leather and shoemaker’s wax, a hand was laid upon her shoulder.

“Heaven bless you, child,” a faint voice said. “You’ve done a kind deed for a friend and been the means of

Jessie's Dollar

blessing a stranger. My poor old mother and I were absolutely at starvation point. God must have sent you hither."

Jessie's heart swelled too full for utterance. The temptations in Warner's window were nothing to her then. She ran down the street with a light, happy heart.

"How late you are!" Mrs. Marsh said, as Jessie entered. It was dusk in the cozy sitting-room.

"Mamma," she said, presently, "I must tell you, I have spent my dollar. And I've had such an odd time! I'm satisfied, though."

Then Jessie told her mother the whole story. Mrs. Marsh kissed her tenderly.

But that was not the end of it. Jessie's

Jessie's Dollar

dollar was likely to have quite a history of its own.

Some time after, on one Saturday, old Matt, who came up to the Marshes' to do chores and rough work, made his appearance in a good, warm, woolen jacket.

“How nice and comfortable you are, Matt,” Mrs. Marsh said. “I was thinking a few days ago how much you needed such a garment.”

“And it came to me most like a present—a queer sort of way that I wasn't counting on. There's a poor woman who does a little sewing and binds shoes for Gregg. She came over to our house for loaves of bread, and she'd run up quite a bill when she stopped. For a while I didn't hear anything from her. 'We'll never ask the

Jessie's Dollar

poor creetur for it,' I said to mother; but last Wednesday she brought a dollar to pay up the back, and get some more bread. So says mother: 'Now, Matt, you must have a jacket right away, for I never expected to get this money at all. I have fifty cents that I can put to it, and it'll just do. So, now I shan't be so likely to get the rheumatiz in my shoulders. The Lord sends everything round about right.'

Jessie glanced up at her mother. Her dollar had benefited even Matt.

"Will you tell me where this poor woman lives?" Mrs. Marsh asked; and that afternoon she and Jessie set out to find her, and were in time to rescue two human beings from starvation.

"What a wonderful dollar!" Uncle

Jessie's Dollar

Mark said, as Jessie, sitting on his knee, recounted its adventures. "I think I'll have to put some more out in the same fashion."

"It's sweeter than sugar-plums," Jessie returned, with a winsome laugh.

[THE END.]

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